

Beauty

The objects, people and places which people find attractive are usually of two types. We can call these “kindly” and “hard”.

Visions of the healthy and nurturing or visions of the hard and challenging.

We may look at a forest, a valley, a mountain or a coastline and, if it looks healthy and supportive, nurturing of life, we instinctively see it as the beautiful environment. On the other hand we are also attracted to a rugged cliff face, a violent waterfall and rapids, the star filled sky and infinite inky black depths of space.

These are the two poles of the majority of human aesthetic art. The beauty of the nurturing kindness and the beauty of the hard challenge.

Humans are able to appreciate both the gentle garden and the rocky road, the kindly face and the threatening monster.

Therefore it is reasonable to ask the question “What is not beautiful?”

The answer, it seems to me, is the sickly. We love the beautiful landscape because it looks healthy. It looks like it supports life in abundance. We love the rocky path or the dangerous looking dark alleyway because they look like a challenge and challenges make us stronger. But the sickly. The unwholesome. The diseased. That is rightly repellent.

A garbage dump of rusting metal and mouldering food waste might be attractive to rats but seldom has appeal to art.

We can be fat or thin or somewhere in the middle and that’s okay. We don’t mind. But if we get so thin that we look like a skeleton or if we get so fat that we look like we’re going to have a heart attack, well, then we reason to worry. There is really no great mystery in human art aesthetics. It’s all about health.

Nevertheless, there is such a thing as a reverse aesthetic.

The reversal of aesthetic values gives the portrayal of hellish twisted human forms where every imaginable disease has riven the flesh asunder and thrown virtue out with the rubbish. The hell raiser zombie and the yellow matter custard dripping from a dead dog’s eye. It’s still about health but reversed. Unbeauty derives from extreme focus on unhealth.

Every force in the universe has an equal and opposite force, that’s how the universe is constructed.

The beauty of the nurturing healthy environment is underpinned by processes we don’t immediately see until we make a deeper study.

Down there in the soil at the roots of the tree are organisms microbial, mycelial or insectoid, crawling, creeping, aerobic or anaerobic, symbiotic or parasitic, making the hidden processes of the world.

Our visions of life kindly or life challenging are not what they appear to be.